

## The Cry of the Martyrs

**Text:** Revelation 6.9–11

**Theme:** God's glorious justice and steadfast mercy enable us to persevere even unto death for Jesus' sake

### Introduction — Letter to Gov. Walz

- such a letter in AD 155, would have gotten you hauled to arena and martyred publicly
- or such statement in AD 1555, would have gotten you burned at the stake
- even such a letter, in certain countries today, would get you killed
- I have no idea what might come from this letter; simply hope it is not ignored

### Jesus told His disciples, in John 15.20:

- **A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you**
- but few of us really believe this
- we think persecution is for people living in history past, future yet to come, or simply third-world countries
- sometimes, we like to think we're persecuted for our opinions or political convictions

### No one likes persecution, to talk about persecution, even to think of it

- but it is a reality, as we see clearly in Revelation 6.9–11
- the question is this: what are we to do in light of the realities presented to us here?
- the Lamb of God slain for God's elect is opening the seals of the scroll
- this scroll is the God's plan of salvation & judgment
- it begins to be opened right after Jesus' ascension & the day of Pentecost
- as we saw with the four horsemen in first four seals, these show partial fulfillments of each
- conquest, war, economic scarcity, and death: all have been happening since that day
- and since we live in the last days, they will continue until Jesus comes
- it is no different with seal #5
- but rather than fear this message, we are to be encouraged, strengthened, even emboldened
- for what we see here is:
- **God's glorious justice & steadfast mercy enabling us to persevere even unto death for Jesus' sake**

### Let's pray

**God's glorious justice & steadfast mercy enables us to persevere even unto death for Jesus' sake**

*We see this first, in verse 9, where we see...*

#### I. THE REALITY OF PERSECUTION

- the scene has shifted from that of earth & the four horsemen to that of heaven
- read v. 9 again
- these are people who died for their faithfulness to the gospel
- you'll recall that the saints in the church in Smyrna were called to be faithful unto death
- those saints and many others are here who did just that
- all these saints have been faithful unto death

### 1. They are “faithful”

- each one of these “souls” under the altar recognized that which was most important
- each was faced with what matters most: faithfulness to God...
- and a life’s commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ
- so precious, so important, so absolutely vital to life was this, they died for it
- more important than pleasure, than leisure, than family, even than life itself
- ever since this seal was first opened, saints have been faced with this challenge
- do I value God, Jesus, His Word, and the Gospel more than going on peacefully, happily?
- that is what it means to be faithful unto death

### 2. Word of God & testimony they had maintained

- in Rev. 1.2, John bears witness to word of God & testimony of Jesus Christ
- then, 1.9, we discover that he has been exiled on account of these two things
- now, in 6.9, we see martyrs: Christians who lost their lives—why?
- because they believed and defended and did not water down the Word of God
- because they testified to who Jesus was, what He did and accomplished
- refused to compromise any of these matters
- did not bow to emperor
- did not worship culture’s gods
- did not corrupt themselves with prevailing views on sex
- instead, they bore testimony to Jesus Christ
- they were witnesses: marturia
- they each one said, “This is one place where we will break rather than bend”

### 3. Under the Altar

- under the altar: what does this mean? What picture is this?
- God dwells in heaven, that is His “temple”
- also was an earthly temple, until Christ fulfilled old covenant temple
- Hebrews 8.5: sanctuary that is a copy & shadow of the one in heaven
- Moses is told to make it according to pattern shown you
- heavenly temple was pattern for earthly temple
- so, there is the altar in tabernacle, then later, in the temple
- actually, there were two altars: one right in front of Holy of holies
- altar where incense was burnt, representing the prayers of God’s people
- other altar was further back in courtyard: four horns on four corners
- altar for burnt offerings
- why are souls under the altar? Not on, but under
- Ex 29.10, image of priest bringing bull to front of tent of meeting
- lays hands on bull, slaughters it, takes blood, puts it on horns, pours rest at base of altar
- Rev 6.9 is a re-enactment of offering a slaughtered sacrifice, blood poured out
- martyrs have been sacrificed on altar, their blood, their souls are underneath
- Christians who have been sacrificed like slaughtered animal are an offering
- martyrdom is a burnt offering in God’s temple

### 4. Are there any hills that you’re willing to die upon?

- figure of speech: “That’s not a hill I’m willing to die on”
- refers to things that really aren’t that big of a deal
- give personal example: certain hymns I may not like, but...
- somethings just aren’t worth the hassle or the arguments, etc

### 5. Will you die on some hills?

- Jesus: even a good man will die for a brother
- would you die for your family? Your children?
- is there some cause you'd fight for today?
- perhaps it would be to end abortion today
- it might be getting engaged in the war on gender/personhood
- but would you die for the Word of God & the testimony of Jesus?

### 6. Difficult for too many modern churches

- so-called post-evangelicals are less inclined to look for truth & propositional statements & moral certitudes
- they look for symbols, ambiguities, and situational judgments
- martyrs under throne not slain for belief in ambiguities & situational judgments
- they believed in truth, in propositional statements about Jesus Christ...
- on account of the word of God and the testimony that they bore
- they were sacrificed upon the altar as an offering to God

### 7. October 16, 1555

- Hugh Latimer, Nicolas Ridley, burned at stake as heretics by Queen Mary, catholic queen
- she hated protestants and reformers, so burned them
- as ready to be burned: Latimer, older man, said to Ridley the younger:
- Be of good cheer Master Ridley, play the man; for we shall this day light such a candle in England that I trust by God's grace shall never be put out
- the candle was their bodies
- are you willing to die on that hill: word of God, testimony of Christ  
[Foxes' Book of Martyrs full of such stories of martyrs who died on that hill]

*Yet even as we see the reality of martyrdom, in v. 10, we hear of...*

## II. THE REALITY OF VINDICATION

- question for v. 10:
- Are you willing to face injustice now for justice later?
- make sure I'm clear: it's not wrong to fight against injustice
- Luke 18: importunate widow, pleading for justice
- it is good to work for justice in this world

### 1. But what if only justice you got was a promise, not the reality?

- that's what these martyrs got
- four horsemen: conquest, war, scarcity, death
- maybe some of these are victims of one of these horsemen
- we are never promised that church will be exempt from suffering
- no, the church has, is, & will have to suffer in these "last days"
- martyrs were wronged; injustice committed against them
- did not get justice in their life time
- now, from death, under the altar, near the Father
- cry out: How long?

### 2. Is this prayer fit for true believers?

- some think not, think beneath us

- one writer said, “This is not a Christian’s prayer”
- does sound different: Stephen in Acts 7, *Lord do not hold this against them*
- Jesus on cross: *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they’re doing*
- but this is allowable; good and necessary for those who face injustice
- Psalm 35.1: **Contend O Lord, with those who contend with me**  
**Fight against those who fight against me**
- Psalm 35.17: **How long will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction**
- Psalm 35.23: **Awake and arouse yourself for my vindication**  
**For my cause, my God, and my Lord**
- Psalm 94: **O Lord, God of vengeance, shine forth!**  
**Rise up, O judge of the earth, repay to the proud what they deserve**
- so, this is a very biblical prayer
- not a sadistic rejoicing at the pain of your enemies
- not a wishing the worst upon them, no gleeful dancing at their demise
- it is simply crying out to God for Him to do the work of justice

### 3. A good kind of prayer

- cry for vindication
- clear my name; show to the world that I am innocent
- Joseph & Potiphar’s wife: accused falsely
- Joseph was wronged, a great injustice occurred
- that’s what these Christians are calling out for: vindication: show the glory of Your name
- so many ways we can be falsely accused as Christians
- ancient Rome thought incestuous: brother & sisters in Christ
- talked about Christians orgies because called communion meals love feasts
- thought they were cannibalistic: talked of eating flesh, drinking blood
- also said they were atheists because no idols, no pictures of their gods
- disturbers of the empire and more
- all this wrong, unjust: cried out for vindication, names to be cleared
- today, could be called homophobic, haters, bigots, arrogant, intolerant and more
- simply concerned for truth, the gospel, the salvation of the lost

### 4. Consistent with God’s character

- all this is based upon the very nature of God
- Sovereign Lord, holy and true
- holy: You cannot look on evil, so judge the wrongdoer
- true: You cannot stand deception and falsehood, so vindicate me
- God needs to be just, to avenge great evil and wrong
- it is essential to His character
- He will make it right; just not always right now, or even in this lifetime

*This is why we need to see...*

### III. THE REALITY OF SOVEREIGNTY

- read v. 11
- God will indeed work His justice...just not according to our timetable, but His
- each of these, wearing a white robe, symbolizing purity & holiness: fully sanctified in heaven
- also told to rest a little longer
- Jesus said, “Come to Me...and I will give you rest...” and now they have it fully
- but told there is a number, and this number has not yet been met

### 1. Are you willing to be in that number?

- Oh, when the saints go marching in
- O Lord, I want to be in that number, when the saints go marching in
- you want to be in that number watching them march in
- but what about when the saints go out: leave this life
- there is a number...a pre-appointed, predestined number of martyrs
- it must be fulfilled, God said, but we want to know “When?”
- remember Jesus: didn’t like the “When?” Question
- never answered it, said it wasn’t given to us to know
- but He did say something about their question

### 2. Mark 13.10: And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations

- every Christian who longs for return of Christ ought to be concerned
- about evangelization of unreached people of world

### 3. 2 Peter 3.9: The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance

- God is not slow as some consider slowness
- He wants all to come to repentance
- “all” here is not every single man, woman, child
- Peter was not a universalist, and neither should we be
- “all” here is in context: Christians spread around, the elect of the dispersion
- not until all of God’s elect are brought home

### 4. Rev 6.11: when all the appointed martyrs have been put to death

- Christianity doesn’t deny death, but turns it on its head
- Christianity says: you die now so you don’t die for all eternity
- you die now so you can truly live
- you die to self so can be ready, if called upon, to die for God
- but you also live and love so boldly and lavishly...
- hold to truth so tenaciously, it may kill you

### 5. Very serious question: Can you say...

- Lord, if you’re willing, I’ll be in that number
- don’t go out looking for it, trying to make it happen
- we worship a suffering Savior
- so, we must ask self: am I willing to be in that number?
- maybe that means I need to consider becoming a missionary
- maybe I need to pray that my kids would become missionaries
- means we need to pray for the lost coming to Jesus

### Conclusion – preach like a doctor and a general

- preach like a doctor: Jesus comes and heals us, by His wounds we are healed
- spiritual, emotional hurts taken care of by Jesus
- but also preach like a general
- issue the call to battle, the call to stand, to hold the line
- hymn #433

